

## Sermon 21.12.19

Luke 1: 39-55

Within a few days Mary set out and hurried to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for you have looked with favor on the lowliness of your servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me,

and holy is your Name.

Your mercy reaches from age to age

To those who fear you.

You have shown strength with your arm;

You have scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

You have brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

You have filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

You have come to the aid of Israel your servant,

Mindful of your mercy -

The promise you made to our ancestors -

To Sarah and Abraham

And their descendants forever.'

SERMON:

Do you know what the 2021 word of the year is, according to dictionary.com?<sup>1</sup>

In 2020 the word was Pandemic, for obvious reasons.

And the word of 2019 was “existential,” referencing the environmental threats we face.

2021?

This year it's 'allyship'.

Allyship is defined as: the relationship or status of persons, groups, or nations associating and cooperating with one another for a common cause or purpose. (Dictionary.com)

The relationship of persons or groups who cooperate for a common purpose. Allyship.

I'd say we just heard a story about allyship.

Elizabeth is, perhaps, Mary's first ally. Elizabeth is who Mary ran to after her encounter with the angel.

I'm curious: Who has been an ally for you? To whom have you gone to, maybe even hurried run to, like Mary? Who have you trusted to hold the stirrings of new life within yourself?

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<sup>1</sup> [Allyship: 2021 word of the year](#)

It was the fall of 2017 when I first saw the ad in *The Mennonite* magazine. I was skimming the section that posts job openings, looking for one I had posted, or meant to post, as I was chairing the search committee at my church in Lancaster at the time. The one I sent in wasn't published, and instead, what caught my eye was a posting for a full time pastor in a college town a few hours away from where I lived.

Me, pastor? No way - the main reason I left the seminary track and chose instead to get my master's in pastoral counseling was because there was no way I was going to preach on a regular basis. God and I were clear on that - my ministry was to be a listening presence, not to speak.

And yet...and yet I picked up that issue of *The Mennonite* over and over, re-reading that summons to a new life.

And I turned to a trusted friend and mentor. I asked Joanne Dietzel, my conference minister, to join me for a cup of tea. I told her of the stirrings within me - might something new, unexpected, be growing within me, waiting to be birthed?

I chose my ally well. Joanne listened, held the possibility - the joy and the fear of sensing God at work in unexpected ways. Joanne joined me in pondering what it might mean, and blessing me as a daughter of the Holy One. Just as Elizabeth proclaimed to Mary:

"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

In her own way, Joanne blessed me that day.

The Greek in our scripture for blessed - when Elizabeth says 'blessed is she who believed' - that use of blessed is *makarios* (mak-ar'-ee-os) - it's the same word from the sermon on the mount, where Jesus said 'blessed are the poor...blessed are the hungry...' (Luke 6: 20-21)

*Makarios* - blessed - receiving God's provisions. Receiving God's provisions when, WHEN we are scared, hungry, poor in all sorts of ways.

The concordance I use says this happens when we listen and obey. The blessing we receive is the inbirthings of faith<sup>2</sup>.

Blessing as inbirthing of faith.

Elizabeth blessed Mary. She named her faith and blessed the new life growing within.

Joanne blessed me that day- providing a space for that inbirthing of faith to grow and eventually bear fruit..

Who has been an ally for you?

One aspect of allyship is providing a safe space - a sanctuary, a refuge - somewhere that's physically and emotionally safe to grow, explore, maybe rest.

Our scripture tells us that 'Mary set out and hurried to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.'

In Luke's gospel, Mary is visited by the angel, she submits herself to receiving the new life, and then, infused by the Spirit, hurries towards Elizabeth, her kinswoman.

After receiving the angel's extraordinary news, Mary retreats to Elizabeth and Zechariah's home to digest her new calling.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/3107.htm>

Mary seeks refuge—physical safety and emotional protection. She receives a safe haven, a home for her heart to soon sing praise.

*Sanctuary and safe space is so crucial for everyone, especially the mother of Christ while she prepares to become a home for God.*

*Mary becoming a home for God.*

*My friends - Sanctuary is anywhere God's love dwells freely and abundantly.*

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Last week we explored John the Baptist's response to the question - *what then shall we do?* And his telling the crowds to go home; go home and do the ordinary work of bringing forth the kingdom of God - the kingdom which is both here and not-yet.

State College, the home for most of us listening, has the opportunity to become a sanctuary - a place of new beginnings for Afghan families that are currently living in refugee camps across the United States.

A few of us here at UMC have been learning about what it will take to provide the support - to become allies of those seeking to build new lives here in our community. Allies who help with transportation, housing, finances - all the stuff needed to create a sanctuary where God's love dwells freely and abundantly.

The local group here in State College is known as ROAR (resettlement outreach and resources). It's made up of persons from various local faith communities and others.

It was just announced that the first Afghan family will arrive here in State College on December 29. Allies are in place to receive them, providing space for them to settle into a new life.

ROAR is looking for individuals or churches, who, in partnership with one another, commit to hosting a family. We've had a church reach out and ask if we want to partner with them - requiring both a financial commitment as well as person-power.

What an opportunity to become allies - to provide a safe space for a family seeking to put down roots and rebuild their lives in this new place! UMC needs a person willing to be our point person. This is not a solo assignment. We work in community, and that point person will be supported. If you sense God calling you to this work, please, let me know.

Like Elizabeth,

Like Joanne did for me by simply listening.

Allies provide sanctuary.

We can each be allies, creating spaces for one another to bring forth our dreams, sing our dreams and hopes and prayers into reality.

Allyship - Providing sanctuary - providing safe spaces to birth new beginnings.  
Mary hurried to the home of Elizabeth. To that place of welcome.

As we sit in the sanctuary of Becky's music, I offer a few questions for you to ponder...

Who has provided sanctuary - been an ally for you as you've pondered ways in which God is at work in your life?

How might God be calling you to be an ally for others?